

*Tract No. III. of the Society for the Promotion of
Permanent and Universal Peace.*

AN
ESSAY
ON THE
DOCTRINES AND PRACTICE
OF THE
EARLY CHRISTIANS,
AS THEY RELATE TO
WAR.

ADDRESSED TO THOSE, WHO PROFESS TO HAVE A REGARD FOR

The Christian Name.

BY THOMAS CLARKSON, M.A.

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AN ESSAY

ON

THE DOCTRINES, &c.

ACCUSTOMED as Christians have been for many centuries, to consider the profession of arms as singularly honourable, and martial achievements, however bloody, as the most glorious of human exploits, it must be difficult for them to see the following passages of Scripture, through a clear, pure, and uncorrupted medium; viz. “I say unto you, resist not evil; love your enemies; do good to them that hate, and pray for them that despitefully use and persecute you.” The prejudices of some, the interests of others, and custom with all, have induced a general belief, that these and similar passages have no relation to wars. But it may be important to all, but more particularly to those, who desire to be accounted real followers of Christ, to know in what manner their first Fathers, the early Christians, understood them; to know how those persons understood them, who were converted by the Apostles themselves, or who had opportunities of interpretation from the very lips of their immediate successors; who believed with all their hearts, that the New Testament was of divine origin; that the precepts it contained were not to be dispensed with to suit particular cases without the imputation of evil; and who chose rather to die by the hand of the public executioner, than to do that which appeared to them to be wrong. Now we intend to furnish the reader with such knowledge, and to prove to him, that long after the introduction of the Christian Religion into the world, that is *while the lamp of Christianity burnt pure and bright*, not only the Fathers of the Church held it unlawful for Christians to bear arms, but those, who

came within the pale of it, *abstained from the use of them*, and this to the certain loss of their lives ; and that *it was not till Christianity became corrupted, that its followers became soldiers*. But if this should be shown to be the case, it is to be hoped that many, who now profess to be Christians, will seriously re-examine those passages of Scripture, on the consideration of which the first Fathers, contrary to their notions and their established habits, gave up the profession of arms ; and that they will endeavour to explain, in a manner satisfactory to themselves, the reason why, on a subject of such vast importance, there should be such an essential difference between the primitive and the modern faith.

With respect to the opinions of the first Christian Writers after the Apostles, or of those, who are usually called the Fathers of the Church, relative to war, I believe we shall find them alike for nearly three hundred years, if not for a longer period. JUSTIN, the martyr, one of the earliest of those in the second century, *considers war as unlawful*. He makes, also, *the devil the author of all war*.

TATIAN, who was the disciple of JUSTIN, in his oration to the Greeks, *speaks in the same terms on the same subject*.

From the different expressions of CLEMENS of Alexandria, a contemporary of the latter, we collect his opinion to be *decisive also against the lawfulness of war*.

TERTULLIAN, who may be mentioned next in order of time, *strongly condemned the practice of bearing arms*. I shall give one or two extracts from him on this subject. In his Dissertation “on the Worship of Idols,” he says, “Though the soldiers came to John, and received a certain form to be observed, and though the centurion believed, yet Jesus Christ, by disarming Peter, disarmed every soldier afterward ; for custom never sanctions an unlawful act.” And in his “Soldier’s Garland,” he says, “Can a soldier’s life be lawful, when Christ has pronounced, that he who lives by the sword shall perish by the sword ? Can one, who professes the peaceable doctrines of the Gospel, be a soldier, when it is his duty not so much as to go to law ? And shall he, who is not to revenge his own wrongs, be instrumental in bringing others into chains, imprisonment, torment, death ?”

CYPRIAN, in his Epistle to DONATUS, speaks thus—“Suppose

thyself," says he, "with me on the top of some very exalted eminence, and from thence looking down upon the appearances of things below. Let our prospect take in the whole horizon, and let us view, with the indifference of persons not concerned in them, the various motions and agitations of human life. Thou wilt then, I dare say, have a real compassion for the circumstances of mankind, and for the posture in which this view will represent them. And when thou reflectest upon thy condition, thy thoughts will rise *in transports of gratitude and praise to God for having made thy escape from the pollutions of the world.* The things thou wilt principally observe will be the highways beset with robbers, the seas with pirates, encampments, marches, and all the terrible forms of war and bloodshed. When a *single murder is committed it shall be deemed, perhaps, a crime; but that crime shall commence a virtue, when committed under the shelter of public authority, so that punishment is not rated by the measure of guilt, but the more enormous the size of the wickedness is, so much the greater is the chance of impunity.*" These are the sentiments of CYPRIAN, and that they were the result of his views of Christianity, as taken from the divine writings, there can be no doubt. If he had stood upon the same eminence, and beheld the same sights, previously to his conversion, he would, like others, have neither thought piracy dishonourable, nor war inglorious.

LACTANTIUS, who lived some time after CYPRIAN, in his *Treatise concerning the true worship of God*, says, "*It can never be lawful for a righteous man to go to war, whose warfare is in righteousness itself.*"

To these may be added ARCHELAUS, AMBROSE, CHRYSOSTOM, JEROM, and CYRIL, all of whom were of opinion, *that it was unlawful for Christians to go to war.*

With respect to the practice of the early Christians, which is the next point to be considered, it may be observed, that there is no well authenticated instance upon record of Christians entering into the army for nearly the two first centuries; but it is true, on the other hand, that they declined the military profession, as one in which it was not lawful for them to engage.

The first species of evidence to this point may be found in the following facts, which reach from about the year 170, to about the

year 195. Cassius had rebelled against the Emperor Verus, and was slain a short time afterwards. Clodius Albinus in one part of the world, and Pescennius Niger in another, had rebelled against the Emperor Severus, and both were slain. Now suspicion fell, as it always did in these times, if any thing went wrong, upon the Christians, as having been concerned upon these occasions. But TERTULLIAN tells us, in his "Discourse to Scapula," that this suspicion was totally groundless. "You defamed us," (Christians) says he, "by charging us with having been guilty of treason to our Emperors, but not a Christian could be found in any of the rebel armies, whether commanded by Cassius, Albinus, or Niger." These, then, are important facts, for the armies in question were very extensive. Cassius was master of all Syria with its four Legions; Niger of the Asiatic and Egyptian Legions; and Albinus of those of Britain; which Legions together contained between a third and a half of the Standing Legions of Rome: and the circumstance, that no Christian was to be found in them, is the more remarkable, because, according to the same TERTULLIAN, Christianity had then spread over almost the whole of the known world.

A second species of evidence may be collected from expressions and declarations in the works of certain authors of those times. JUSTIN the martyr, and TATIAN, *make distinctions between soldiers and Christians*; and CLEMENS of Alexandria gives the Christians, who were contemporary with him, the appellation of the "*Peaceable*," thus distinguishing them from others of the world; and he says expressly, that the "*Peaceable*" *never used sword nor bow*, meaning by these the instruments of war.

A third species of evidence, may be found in the belief, which the writers of these times had, that the Prophecy of Isaiah, which predicted that men should turn their swords into ploughshares and their spears into pruning-hooks, was then in the act of completion.

IRENÆUS, who flourished about the year 180, affirms that this famous Prophecy had been completed in his time, "*for the Christians*," says he, "*have changed their swords and their lances into instruments of peace, and they know not how to fight.*" JUSTIN the Martyr, who was contemporary with IRENÆUS, as-

serts the same thing, which he could not have done, if the Christians in his time had engaged in war. "That the Prophecy," says he, "is fulfilled you have good reason to believe, for *we, who in times past killed one another, do not now fight with our enemies.*" And here it is observable, that the Greek word "*fight*" does not mean to strike, or to beat, or to give a blow, but actually *to fight as in war*; and the Greek word "*enemy*" does not mean a private adversary, or one who has injured us, but *an enemy of the State*; and the sentence, which follows that which has been given, puts the matter out of all doubt. TERTULLIAN, who lived after both, speaks in these remarkable words—"Deny that these (meaning the turning of swords into plough-shares) are the things prophesied of, *when you see what you see*, or that they are the things fulfilled *when you read what you read*; but if you deny neither of these positions, then you must confess that the Prophecy has been accomplished, *as far as the practice of every individual is concerned, to whom it is applicable.*" We might go from TERTULLIAN even as far as THEODORET, if it were necessary, to show that the Prophecy in question was considered as in the act of completion in those times.

The fourth and last species of evidence may be found in the assertions of Celsus, and in the reply of ORIGEN to that writer. CELSUS, who lived at the end of the second century, attacked the Christian Religion. He made it one of his charges against the Christians, that *they refused in his time to bear arms for the Emperor, even in the case of necessity, and when their services would have been accepted.* He told them further, that if the rest of the Empire were of their opinion, it would soon be overrun by the Barbarians. Now Celsus dared not have brought this charge against the Christians, if the fact had not been publicly known. But let us see whether it was denied by those, who were of opinion that his work demanded a reply. The person, who wrote against him in favour of Christianity, was ORIGEN, who lived in the third century. But ORIGEN, in his answer, *admits the facts as stated by Celsus, that the Christians would not bear arms in his time, and justifies them for refusing the practice on the principle of the unlawfulness of war.*

And as the early Christians would not enter into the armies,

so there is good ground to suppose that, when they became converted there, they relinquished their profession. We find, from TERTULLIAN, in his "*Soldier's Garland*," that many in his time, *immediately on their conversion to Christianity quitted the military service*. We are told, also, by Archelaus, who flourished under Probus in the year 278, that many Roman soldiers, who had embraced Christianity after having witnessed the piety and generosity of Marcellus, *immediately forsook the profession of arms*. We are told, also, by EUSEBIUS, that about the same time "*Numbers laid aside a military life and became private persons rather than abjure their religion*."

Here, then, is a collection of evidence and facts, all tending to show, that for nearly the first two hundred years after the introduction of Christianity into the world, none of those, who professed to be Christians, would either take upon themselves, or continue the profession of soldiers. But as an objection may be made to the foregoing statements, it will be proper to notice it in this place.

It may be said, that the military oath, *which all were obliged to take alike in the Roman armies*, and which was to be repeated annually, *was full of idolatry*; that the Roman standards were *all considered as gods, and had divine honours paid them by the soldiery*; and that images, also, of the Emperors, which were either fixed upon these standards, or placed in the midst of them in a temple in the camp, *were to be worshipped in the same manner*. Now these impious customs were interwoven with the military service. *No one soldier in the Roman armies was exempted from them*. It may be urged, therefore, that no Christian could submit to such services. Indeed, when a person was suspected of being a Christian in those times, he was instantly taken to the altar to sacrifice, it being notorious that, if he were a Christian, he would not sacrifice, though the loss of his life was the certain consequence of his refusal. Is it not, therefore, an objector may say, to be presumed, that *these idolatrous tests and customs operated as the great cause, why Christians refused to enter into the army, or why they left it when converted, as mentioned in a former page*.

That these tests operated as a cause, that is, as one cause, must be allowed. This is stated by TERTULLIAN himself. He makes it one of his arguments against the lawfulness of serving in the

army. Does he not say, "that the military oath and the baptismal vow were inconsistent with each other, the one being the sign of Christ, the other of the Devil?" Does he not also call the military standard "The Rival, or Enemy of Christ?" But all history confirms the fact. Take the following instance to the point. Marinus, according to EUSEBIUS, was a man of family and fortune, and an officer in a legion, which, in the year 260, was stationed at Cæsarea, of Palestine. One of the centurion's rods happened to become vacant in this legion, and Marinus was appointed to it. But just at this moment another, next to him in rank, accused him before the tribunal of being a Christian, stating, "that the laws *did not allow a Christian, who refused to sacrifice to the Emperors*, to hold any dignity in the army." Achæus, the judge, asked Marinus, if it was true that he had become a Christian. He acknowledged it. Three hours were then allowed him to consider *whether he would sacrifice or die*. When the time expired he chose the latter. But the history of those times is full of instances of this sort. Indeed, so desirous were the early Christians of keeping clear of Idolatry in every shape, that they avoided every custom, which appeared in the least degree connected with it. Thus, when a largess was given in honour of the Emperors, L. Septimius Severus, the father, and M. Aurelius Caracalla, the son, a solitary soldier, as we learn from TERTULLIAN, was seen carrying the garland, which had been given him on that occasion, in his hand, while the rest wore it upon their heads. The Church at this time held it unlawful for any Christian to wear the garland, because it belonged to the dress of the Heathen Priests when they were sacrificing to their gods. On being interrogated by his commander, why he refused wearing it, he replied, that he had become a Christian. He was immediately punished before the army, and sent into prison.

But though unquestionably the idolatrous services, required of the soldiers of those times, hindered Christians from entering into the armies, and compelled those, who were converted in them, to leave them, nothing is more true than that the belief, that *it was unlawful for Christians to fight*, occasioned an equal abhorrence of a military life.

There were *three notions*, upon which this belief was grounded. The first was, that it was their duty, according to the Scriptures, *to love their enemies*. At this time the world was full of divisions and bitterness. The Jews looked upon the Gentiles as dogs and outcasts, so as not even to tell them their road when asked, or give them a draught of water. The Gentiles, on the other hand, considered the Jews as the enemies of all nations, and as the haters of mankind. Nations, too, were set against each other on account of former and existing wars. JUSTIN the martyr, in allusion to this unhappy state of things, says, “We, who once hated each other, and delighted in mutual quarrels and slaughter, and, according to custom, refused to sit at the same fire with those who were not of our own tribe and party, *now since the appearance of Christ in the world live familiarly with them, pray for our enemies*, and endeavour to persuade them, who hate us unjustly, to order their lives according to the excellent precepts of Christ, that so they may have good hope to obtain the same rewards with us from the great Lord and Judge of all things.” Such was the practice of the early Christians, as founded on this tenet. TERTULLIAN says, “it was their peculiar character to love their enemies,” and ATHENAGORAS, JULIAN, and LACTANTIUS, make “this their character to have been a proof of the divinity of their religion.” It was impossible, therefore, while they embraced this heavenly tenet, (*even had the idolatrous services of the army been dispensed with*) that they could have appeared in the shape of warriors.

The *second notion* was (and it continued while Christianity was pure and unmixed with the interpretation of political men) that it became them, in obedience to the commands of Christ, *to abstain from all manner of violence, and to become distinguishable as the followers of peace*. The sublime way, in which they viewed the command in question, may be judged of in a more appropriate manner by the interpretation, which ISIDORE of PELUSIUM has left us of it. “The great King of Heaven,” says he, “came down from above to deliver to the world rules for an heavenly conduct, which he has placed in a certain *mode of contending, quite contrary to that in the Olympic Games*. There he,

that fights and gets the better, receives the Crown. Here he, that is struck and bears it meekly, has the honour and applause. There he, that returns blow for blow.—Here he, that turns the other cheek, is celebrated in the theatre of Angels; for the victory is not measured by revenge, but by a wise and generous patience. This is the new law of Crowns.—This is the new way of contending for the mastery.” We find, accordingly, from ATHENAGORAS and other early writers, that the Christians of their time *abstained, when they were struck, from striking again*, and that they carried their principles so far, as even to *refuse to go to law with those who injured them*. It was impossible, therefore, again, while they interpreted the Scriptures in this manner (*though nothing idolatrous had been required of them*) “to have used the sword or the bow,” or indeed any other weapon, for the purposes of war.

The third notion was, that the slaughter of men in war was neither more nor less than direct murder. They had such an abhorrence of murder, and of being thought to be implicated, in the very smallest degree, in so atrocious a crime, that they refused to be present where the life of a fellow-creature was taken away, whatever was the occasion. ATHENAGORAS, TATIAN, THEOPHILUS ANTIOCHENUS, and MINUTIUS FELIX, all agree in asserting, that they kept away from the Gladiatorial shows, and they give us their reasons for so doing. This we do, says THEOPHILUS, “lest we should become partakers of the murders committed there.” A similar reason is also given by ATHENAGORAS on this occasion: “Who is there,” says he, “that does not prize the shows of the gladiators, which your Emperors make for the people, but we, thinking that there is very little difference, *whether a man be the author or spectator of murder*, keep away from all such sights.” And here it may be observed, that the gladiators themselves were generally prisoners of war, or reputed enemies; and that the slaughter of these was by public authority, and sanctioned as in war by the State. Now, what conclusion are we to draw from these premises? Can we think it possible that those, who thought an attendance at the gladiatorial spectacles criminal on the principle, *that he, who stood by, was a murderer, (though the murder was sanctioned by authority)* should not have also thought it criminal to

engage in the military service upon the principle, *that it was unlawful to fight.*

In short the belief of the unlawfulness of War on the three notions just explained (*independently of any connexion of Idolatry with the Military Service*) appears to have been universal among Christians of those times. Every Christian Writer of the second century, who notices the subject, makes it *unlawful for Christians to bear Arms*. And as this belief seems to have been universal, so it operated as an impediment to a military life, quite as much as the Idolatry that was connected with it, of which the following instances, taken by way of illustration, though at somewhat different periods, may suffice.

The first I propose to mention shall be, where there was an objection to entering into the Military service upon *this very principle*.

Maximilian, having been brought before the tribunal, in order to be enrolled as a Soldier, Dion the Proconsul asked him his name. Maximilian, turning to him, replied, “Why wouldst thou know my name? *I am a Christian, and cannot fight.*”

Then Dion ordered him to be enrolled, and, when he was enrolled, it was recited out of the Register, that he was five feet ten inches high. Immediately after this, Dion bade the officer mark him. But Maximilian refused to be marked, still asserting that he was a Christian; upon which Dion instantly replied, “Bear Arms, or thou shall die.”

To this Maximilian answered, “*I cannot fight if I die. I am not a Soldier of this world, but a Soldier of God.*” Dion then said, “Who has persuaded thee to behave thus?” Maximilian answered, “My own mind, and He who called me.” Dion then spoke to his father, and bade him persuade his son. But his father observed, that his son knew his own mind, and what it was best for him to do.

After this had passed, Dion addressed Maximilian again in these words, “Take thy Arms, and receive the Mark.” “I can receive,” says Maximilian, “no such mark. I have already the Mark of Christ:” upon which Dion said, “I will send thee quickly to thy Christ.” “Thou mayest do so,” says Maximilian; “but the Glory will be mine.”

Dion then bade the officer mark him, But Maximilian still

persisted in refusing; and spoke thus: "I cannot receive the Mark of this world, and if thou shouldst give me the Mark, I will destroy it. It will avail nothing. I am a Christian, and it is not lawful for me to wear such a mark about my neck, when I have received the saving Mark of the Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of the living God, whom thou knowest not, who died to give us life, and whom God gave for our sins. Him all we Christians obey.—Him we follow as the Restorer of our life, and the Author of our salvation."

Dion instantly replied to this, "Take thy Arms, and receive the Mark, or thou shalt suffer a miserable death."—"But I shall not perish," says Maximilian: "my name is already enrolled with Christ, *I cannot fight.*"

Dion said, "Consider then thy youth, and bear Arms. The profession of Arms becomes a young man." Maximilian replied, "*My Arms are with the Lord. I cannot fight for any earthly consideration. I am now a Christian.*"

Dion, the Proconsul, said "Among the Life Guards of our masters, Dioclesian and Maximian, and Constantius and Maximus, there are Christian Soldiers, and they fight." Maximilian answered, "They know best what is expedient for them; *but I am a Christian, and it is unlawful to do Evil.*"

Dion said, "Take thy Arms; despise not the profession of a Soldier, lest thou perish miserably."—"But I shall not perish," says Maximilian; "and, if I should leave this world, my soul will live with Christ the Lord."

Dion then ordered his name to be struck from the roll; and, when this was done, he proceeded, "Because, out of thy rebellious spirit, thou hast refused to bear arms, thou shalt be punished according to thy deserts, for an example to others;" and then he delivered the following sentence: "Maximilian! because thou hast, with a rebellious spirit, refused to bear arms, thou art to die by the sword."—Maximilian replied, "Thanks be to God."

He was twenty years, three months, and seventeen days old; and, when he was led to the place of execution, he spoke thus:—"My dear brethren, endeavour with all your might, that it may be your portion to see the Lord, and that he may

give you such a Crown ;” and then, with a pleasant countenance, he said to his father, “ Give the executioner the soldier’s coat thou hast gotten for me, and, when I shall receive thee in the company of the blessed martyrs, we may rejoice together with the Lord.”

After this he suffered. His mother, Pompeiana, obtained his body from the judge, and conveyed it to Carthage, and buried it near the place where the body of CYPRIAN the martyr lay. And thirteen days after this his mother died, and was buried in the same place. And Victor, his father, returned to his habitation, rejoicing and praising God, that he had sent before such a gift to the Lord, himself expecting to follow after.

We shall only observe upon this instance, that it is nearly pure and unmixed, or that it is but little connected with idolatrous circumstances ; or rather, that the *unlawfulness of fighting* was principally urged by Maximilian as a reason against entering into a military life. Let us now find a case, where, when a person was converted in the army, he left it, pleading *this principle* again, as one among others, for his dereliction of it.

Marcellus was a Centurion in the Legion called Trajana. On a festival, given in honour of the birth-day of Galerius, he threw down his military belt at the head of the legion, and, in the face of the standards, declared with a loud voice, *that he would no longer serve in the Army ; for that he had become a Christian.* “ I hold in detestation,” says he, addressing himself to all the Soldiers, “ the worship of your gods ; gods, which are made of wood and stone ; gods which are deaf and dumb.” So far Marcellus, it appears, seems to have been influenced in his desertion of a military life *by the Idolatry connected with it.* But let us hear him further on this subject.—“ *It is not lawful,*” says he, “ *for a Christian, who is a servant of Christ the Lord, to bear Arms for any earthly consideration.*” After a delay of more than three months in prison after this transaction, which delay was allowed for the purpose of sparing him, he was brought before the Prefect. There he had an opportunity of correcting his former expressions. But, as he persisted in the same sentiments, he suffered. It is remarkable that, almost immediately after his execution, Cassian, who was the notary to the same

Legion, refused to serve any longer, by publicly throwing his pen and accout-book on the ground, and declaring, at the same time, that the sentence of Marcellus was unjust. When taken up, by the order of Aurelianus Agricolaus, he is described, by the record preserved by Ruinart, to *have avowed the same sentiments* as Marcellus ; and, like him, to have suffered death.

Let us now find a case, where a converted Soldier left the army, pleading *the same principle*. Martin, of whom Sulpicius Severus says so much, had been bred to the profession of Arms, but, on his conversion to Christianity, declined it. In the answer, which he gave to Julian the Apostate for his conduct on this occasion, we find him making use of these words, “ *I am a Christian, and therefore I cannot fight.*”

And here it may be observed, that though the noble Martyrs now mentioned grounded their apology for declining the military service, some, on account of the idolatry which belonged to it, and others of the unlawfulness of fighting ; yet that, which was more usually set up by them, when they were brought before the tribunals, was comprehended in the simple declaration, that *having now become Christians, they could be no longer Soldiers*. Let us quote the instance of Tarachus, another military man and martyr, and let this serve for all. Tarachus underwent his examination at Tarsus in Cilicia. Numerianus Maximus sat as the President on the judgment-seat. “ What is your name ?” says Maximus. “ I am called Tarachus (says the prisoner) by my father, but my military name is Victor.” The President goes on : “ And what is your condition ?” The prisoner replies, “ I have led a military life, and am a Roman. I was born at Claudiopolis, a city of Isauria, and, *because I am a Christian, I have abandoned my profession of a Soldier.*” Such was the answer usually given to the tribunals on such occasions, without any specification as to which of the two principles had influenced the conduct of those who were brought before them : and, whenever we hear of such general apology or answer, we cannot doubt, that they, who made use of it, were actuated by both. *The unlawfulness of fighting* was as much a principle of religion in the early times of Christianity as *the refusal of sacrifice to the*

Heathen Gods; and they operated equally to prevent men from entering into the army, and to drive them out of it on their conversion. Indeed these principles always went together, where the profession of arms presented itself as an occupation for a Christian. He, who refused the profession, on account of the idolatry connected with it, would have refused it on account of the unlawfulness of fighting. And he, who refused it on account of the guilt of fighting, would have refused it on account of the idolatrous services it required. *Both and each of them were impediments, in the early times of Christianity, to a military life.*

Having now shown what were the sentiments of the Fathers of the Christian Church, and what was the practice of those that belonged to it, for two centuries, on the subject of war, we come to the proof of the third and last Proposition, namely, that *as the lamp of Christianity burnt bright in those early times, so those, who were illuminated by it, declined the military profession; that, as its flame shone less clear, they had less objection to it; and that it was not till Christianity became corrupted, that its followers became soldiers.* Thus in the two first centuries, when Christianity was the purest, there are no Christian soldiers upon record. In the third century, when it became less pure, there is frequent mention of such soldiers. And in the fourth, when its corruption was fixed, Christians entered generally upon the profession of arms, with as little hesitation as they entered upon any other occupation of life.

That there were no Christian soldiers, at any rate upon record, for the best part of two centuries, has already been made apparent.

That Christianity also was purest in these times, there can be no doubt. Let us look at the character, which is given of the first Christians by ATHENAGORAS, JUSTIN the Martyr, MINUCIUS FELIX, and others of the early Christian writers. According to these, they were plain and neat in their apparel, and frugal in their furniture. They were temperate in their eating and drinking. They relinquished all the diversions of the times, in which they saw any tendency to evil. They were chaste in their conversation, tempering mirth with gravity. They were modest

and chaste in their deportment and manners. They were punctual to their words and engagements. They were such lovers of truth, that, on being asked if they were Christians, they never denied it, though death was the consequence. They loved each other as brethren, and called one another by that name. They were kind, and courteous, and charitable beyond all example. They abstained from all manner of violence. They prayed for those who persecuted them. They were patterns of humility and patience. They made no sacrifice of their consciences, but would persevere in that which was right, never refusing to die for their religion. This is the character which is given of them by the different writers of those times.

That their conduct was altered in the third century, where we are now to view it, we may collect from indisputable authority. It was stated, some time ago, that a Christian soldier was punished for refusing to wear a garland, like the rest of his comrades, on a public occasion. This man, it appears, had been converted whilst in the army, and objected to the ceremony on that account. Now TERTULLIAN tells us, that this soldier *was blamed for his unseasonable zeal*, as it was called, *by some of the Christians at that time, though all Christians before considered the wearing of such a garland as unlawful and profane*. This blame or censure is the first expression upon record, from which we may date the beginning of conformity on the part of the early Christians *with the opinions of the world*. There were then, as TERTULLIAN confesses, certain Christian Casuists, who, it appears, had so far degenerated from the pure principles of their ancestors, as to think that many of the Heathen customs might be complied with, though strictly forbidden by the Church; in fact, *that they might go any length, without the just imputation of idolatry, provided they did not sacrifice to the Pagan Gods, or become Heathen Priests*. Indeed his whole book, “on the Worship of Idols,” is a continued satire *on the occasional conformity of his brethren* in the beginning of the third century, or, in other words, of *an occasional mercenary compliance, on their part, with the Pagan worship*. At this time there is no question but the Christian discipline began to relax. To the ease, which the Christians enjoyed from the death of Antoninus to the tenth year of Severus, is to be as-

cribed the corruption that ensued. This corruption we find to have spread rapidly. TERTULLIAN lived long enough to know, that several, bearing the name of Christians, but who were no doubt the disciples of the Casuists just mentioned, had entered into the Roman armies. This fact we find in his "Apology"; for when the Pagans charged the Christians, as they had pretty constantly done, with being useless to the Commonwealth, he answers the accusation in part by saying, that there were then Christians in the military service of their country. "We serve," says he, "with you and your armies;" a very different answer this, to that which ORIGEN gave Celsus on a similar charge respecting what had been the state of things in the second century, as appears in a former page! But the corruption did not stop here. The same TERTULLIAN was enabled to furnish us with the extraordinary instance of *manufacturers of Idols* being admitted into the *Ecclesiastical order*. Many corruptions are also noticed in this century by other writers. CYPRIAN complained of them, as they existed in the middle; and EUSEBIUS, as they existed at the end of it; and both attributed them to the ease and security which the Christians had enjoyed. The latter gives us a melancholy account of their change. They had begun to live in fine houses and to indulge in luxuries. But, above all, they had begun *to be envious and quarrelsome, and to dissemble, and to cheat, and to falsify their word*, so that they had lost the character, which Pliny, an adversary to their religion, had been obliged to give of them, and which they had retained for more than a century after this, as appears by their own writers.

That there were Christian soldiers in this more corrupt century of the Church it is impossible to deny; for, besides what has been just advanced, such frequent mention is made of them in the histories which relate to this period, that we cannot refuse our assent to one or other of the Propositions, either that there were men in the armies, who *called themselves Christians*, or that there were men in them, *who had that name given them by others*. That there were Christians, however, that is, real Christians, is another question. They were probably such Christians as the Casuists of TERTULLIAN; or such as Dion mentioned to have been among the Life-Guards of Dioclesian and Maximian, and

of Constantius and Maximus, of whom Maximilian observed, “these men may know what it is expedient for them to do, but *I am a Christian, and, therefore, I cannot fight.*” Indeed, *that real Christians could have been found in the army in this century is impossible.* For the *military oath, which was full of idolatry, and the worshipping of the standards, and the performance of sacrifice, still continued as services not to be dispensed with by the soldiery.* No one therefore can believe, that *men in the full practice of Pagan idolatry, as every legionary soldier must then have been, were real Christians, merely because it is recorded in history, that men, calling themselves Christians, were found in the army in those times.* On the other hand, if any soldiers professed Christianity at this period, or are related by authors to have professed it, and yet to have remained soldiers, it may be directly pronounced, that they could only have been *nominal or corrupted Christians.*

That Christianity was more degenerate in the fourth than in the third century, we have indubitable proof. Let us look at the evidence, with which LACTANTIUS furnishes us in his book on “the Death of the Persecuted.” He tells us “that the sacrifices did not do well, *when any of the Christians attended them.*” What ! Christians present at the Heathen sacrifices, and sitting at meat in the Idols’ temple, contrary to the prohibition of St. Paul ! But this is not all. He gives us in the same book another piece of information about the Christian conformists of this time, in the following words : “The Emperor,” says he, “while he was in the East, made a sacrifice of oxen, and endeavoured to ascertain, by inspection of the entrails, ~~what~~ was about to happen. At this time some Christians, *who filled the inferior offices of the (Heathen) priesthood, while they were giving their assistance to the High Priest on this occasion,* marked their foreheads with the sign of the cross. The consequence was, that the Aruspices were frightened, and could not collect their usual marks.” Here then we see not only that Christians were present at some of the heathen sacrifices, but that they filled offices belonging to the lower order of the Pagan hierarchy. We may go, however, still farther, and we may assert upon authority undeniable, that it was ~~no~~ *no uncommon thing, in this age, for Chris-*

tians to accept of *Heathen Priesthoods* ; for the Council of Elvira, in the beginning of the fourth century, was forced to *make several Canons to forbid such scandalous usages*, which Canons are now extant. But it is not necessary to detail these or other particulars. Almost every body knows that more evils sprang up to the Church in this century, than in any other, some of which remain at the present day. Indeed, the *corruption of Christianity was fixed as it were by law* in the age now mentioned. Constantine, on his conversion, introduced many of the Pagan ceremonies and superstitions, in which he had been brought up, into the Christian religion. The Christians, rejoicing to see an Emperor of their own religious persuasion, under whom they had hopes of restoration to equal privileges with others, and of freedom from persecution, submitted, in order to please or flatter him, to his idolatrous customs and opinions, thus sacrificing their consciences to their ease and safety. Many, on the other hand, who had always been heathens, professed themselves Christians at once, merely out of compliment to their Emperor, and without any real conversion of the heart. Thus there was a mixture of Christianity and Heathenism in the Church, which had never been known before. Constantine too did not dispense with the blasphemous titles of Pontifex Maximus, Divinity, and Eternity, as they had been given to his predecessors. After his death he was considered also as a god. And, if Philostorgius is to be believed, the Christians, *for so he calls them*, prayed to and worshipped him as such.

Now in this century, when the corruption of the Church may be considered to have been fixed, we scarcely find any mention of Christian soldiers, or rather we find the distinction between them and others gradually passing away. The truth is, that when the Christians of this age had submitted to certain innovations upon their religion, they were in a fit state to go greater lengths ; and this they did (no doubt out of compliment to their Brother-Emperor) *in the relaxation of their religious scruples, as they related to war*. It may be observed however, that this relaxation was promoted also by other means. The existing government, in order to make the military service more palatable to them, dispensed with the old military oath, and allowed them

to swear “ by God, by Christ, and by the Holy Spirit, and by the Majesty of the Emperor, which, next to God, was to be loved and honoured by mankind.” This political manœuvre did away, in some measure, *a part of the objection to a military life, which arose from the idolatry connected with it.* The grand tenet on war began also to be frittered down by some of the leading clergy themselves, so as to lose its former meaning. It had been formerly held unlawful for Christians to fight at all. It was now insinuated as if it was allowable in a certain case; that is, if they fought under the banners of *Christian Emperors*, for bloodshed in war was more excusable when in the cause of virtue and religion. This new interpretation of the old tenet afforded a salvo or excuse to the consciences of many, and helped to take off *that other part of the objection to a military life, which consisted in the unlawfulness of fighting.* Hence the unlawfulness of fighting began to be given up. We find however, that here and there an ancient Father still retained it as a religious tenet, but these dropping off one after another, it ceased at length to be a doctrine of the Church.

Having now examined the subject as far as we intended, we purpose to conclude it with a few, we hope, not impertinent remarks.—

The proposition, with which we set out, has, we presume, been sufficiently proved. It has been made to appear, that *while the lamp of Christianity burnt pure and bright, not only the Fathers of the Church held it unlawful for Christians to bear arms, but those, who came within the pale of it, abstained from the use of them, and this to the certain loss of their lives; and that it was not till Christianity became corrupted, that its followers became soldiers.* This is a most awful fact for those who profess the Christian religion, but who sanction war, at the present day. The consideration of it ought to make them tremble as to the ground of their opinions on this subject. It ought to make them fly to the Divine Writings, and inquire, with an anxiety proportioned to the magnitude of the case, what scope the latter afford them for a construction of the precepts therein contained, so injurious both to the morals and to the happiness of mankind.

We invite them, then, most seriously to such an inquiry; and,

first, we would recommend them to consider, whether they think they have more opportunities of light as to the understanding of the Holy Scriptures, than their forefathers, the early Christians, had. They will bear in remembrance, that the *original* writings of the different Evangelists and Apostles, which go under that name, and copies taken *immediately* from these, were all in use in these times. They will bear in remembrance again, that some epistles, written by the immediate disciples of the former, were then in circulation, *which are now lost*. Nor will they, we hope, forget this important fact, that *there was but one link* between some of the Fathers, who protested against war in the second century, and the Apostles themselves; so that what the former heard, as doctrines on particular points, they heard from those *who conversed immediately with the latter*. Let us take the instance of IRENÆUS. The latter, when a young man, attended the preaching of that illustrious Martyr, POLYCARP: and where did POLYCARP learn his religious tenets but from JOHN, the beloved disciple of Jesus Christ? IRENÆUS, in his Epistle to FLORINUS, speaks of this circumstance himself. “I saw thee,” says he, “FLORINUS, when I was yet a youth with POLYCARPUS, in the lower Asia, living gorgeously in the Emperor’s palace, and busying thyself with all thy might to get into favour and credit with him. For I remember better the things of old than the affairs of late; for the things we learn in our childhood sink deeper into our minds, and grow together with us: So that I remember the very place where POLYCARPUS sat when he taught; his going out and his coming in; his occupation of life; the figure and proportion of his person; the Sermon made unto the Multitude; the Report he made of his conversation with JOHN and others, who had seen the Lord; how he remembered their sayings, and what he heard out of their mouths touching the Lord, of his power and doctrine, reciting precepts, and all things consonant to holy Scripture, out of the mouths, I say, of those, who had seen with their own eyes the Word of Life in the flesh. These things at that time, through the mercy of God which wrought in me, I diligently marked, and painted not on paper, but printed in my heart, which continually, through the grace of God, I ponder and meditate upon.”

We would now recommend another matter to their serious inquiry. War, it must be allowed, is *a complication of moral evil*, that is, *of those acts, which have been marked as crimes both by the laws of God and man*. It includes robbery. It includes bloodshed *not unawares*, which is the Scriptural definition of murder. We leave out of the catalogue fraud, debauchery, hatred, resentment, and the exercise of all the bad passions of our nature. The point then, which we throw out for their inquiry is, Whether theft can be otherwise than theft; and the shedding of blood premeditatedly be otherwise than murder, *on any occasion whatever*? Whether there are *two different standards of morality for men, the one allowed to be changed for the other as it is either a time of war, or a time of peace*? Whether it can be discovered any where in the Holy Scriptures, *that a dispensation has been given to any of the potentates, cabinets, or magistrates of the earth, to alter the nature of vice, or to dissolve, at their discretion, the responsibility of man to God for his own actions*? If there be a dispensation for these purposes, then, we presume, neither were the Scriptures intended for, nor are they binding upon, *all*; but a door is opened to licentiousness, *and every species of evil, by those, of whom it is required to be the rulers, under God, for good*; and man's accountableness to God for his own actions done in the flesh is annihilated at pleasure, and he need no longer attempt to work out his own salvation, *as this can be undertaken for him by another*. But if, on the other hand, there be no dispensation to any person whatever for these purposes, then in what an awful situation do we stand, and what title have we to the name of Christians, while we are the favourers of war!

The last question, which we shall offer for their solution, is the following: Which of the two have laboured most for the honour and glory of God and the good of mankind; they, by whose interpretation of Scripture war had been extirpated from the earth, had it been followed by others; or they, who, by a different interpretation, have contributed to continue it? or, (which is another way of putting the question) Which of the two deserve better the name of Christians; they, who by their interpretation enlarge, or they who lessen, the number of the moral obligations of the Gospel? Surely it does not become us

either to abridge the dignity of the new covenant, or to put bounds to its benevolence. If it was the desire of Jesus Christ that men should love their enemies, it is our duty to believe, that his wish could not have been otherwise than universal. If it was an object with him to cure moral evil, it is our duty to suppose, that it was his desire to destroy it, not partially, but to the utmost possible extent. If it was his gracious design to give happiness to man, it is our duty to determine, that he intended to give it, not in a limited proportion, but in the largest possible measure. Do we not in our public churches, and in our private and family devotions, pour forth our prayers to God, “*that his kingdom, that is, the reign of virtue and happiness upon earth, may come?*” But how can his kingdom ever come, while wars are tolerated; or, in other words, while those crimes which are universally the concomitants of war, are not even viewed as crimes, but rather considered as meritorious, and even extolled as virtues? These are matters, which deserve the most serious consideration of those, who are desirous of being accounted Christians. To such alone we have addressed ourselves; and we now take our leave of them, under the pleasing hope, that they will re-examine the Holy Scriptures, and then endeavour to account, in a manner satisfactory to themselves (as we set out with recommending in this essay) *why, on a subject of such vast importance as that of war, there should be such an essential difference between the primitive and the modern faith;* and, also, that they will take one other matter into their most serious consideration, *viz. whether ARBITRATION be not the only Christian way of settling public differences; and whether such a way, if resorted to by Princes, would not be as practicable, as agreeable, as efficient, and as happy in its Issue, as that, which has been hitherto adopted, of deciding them by the Sword.*

F I N I S.